

As drought conditions persist, water conservation crucial

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Diligence in water conservation is always necessary in Colorado's semi-arid part of the country and Fort Carson has long been aware of the need to use water resources wisely. Although mountain snow pack this year has improved reservoir water levels, the plains of Colorado are still experiencing dry conditions.

Since drought conditions began in 2002, according to the Directorate of Public Works, residents and workers have significantly helped reduce Fort Carson's water use. From FY00 (pre-drought) to FY05, water use was reduced by 495,985,000 gallons or 44.5 percent.

The installation is also stepping up its efforts and finding new ways to reduce water use. One initiative researched and proposed by Brad McColery, irrigation lead for the post operations and maintenance contractor, has now been adopted Army-wide.

McColery suggested the DPW install rain sensors on their automated irrigation systems to better determine watering needs. The sensors are set to detect specific amounts of rainfall and when there is enough precipitation, automatically shut off the sprinkler systems from turning on. These simple, inexpensive devices were installed at 89 automated irrigation systems between the summer and start of winter in 2005.

The rain sensors, in conjunction with adopting a 20-minute interval watering schedule to allow for better moisture absorption and avoid water run off, has already yielded significant savings in the first year. The initiative, which required only a \$9,000 investment in units and associated labor, saved Fort Carson an estimated 40 million gallons of water and \$108,000 in water purchase costs in FY05, according to Vince Guthrie, DPW utilities program manager.

People living and working on Fort Carson remain a crucial piece of the conservation puzzle. Simple indoor and outdoor conservation tips go along way in reducing overall water use:

- Take showers instead of baths. When showering be aware of how long the shower lasts. Reducing a shower from eight to five minutes, according to Colorado Springs Utilities, can save up to 600 gallons a month
- Don't use the toilet as a trash can – it wastes water to flush trash articles. Approximately five gallons of water are used per flush.
- Don't let the water run while washing dishes, shaving and brushing teeth

Outdoor lawn care makes up a large percentage of water use during summer months. It is best to water lawns only as needed and when it demonstrates a need (starts to wilt). The best time to water lawns is in the morning because there is less evaporation. Also, avoid watering in the evening, which can lead to fungal diseases in the lawn.

Lawns require no more than two-to-three waterings per week. The root systems become longer and more drought-resistant on a less frequent watering schedule. Lawns watered in shorter cycles avoid water runoff and thereby allow better moisture absorption.

For more information about how to conserve water or to submit suggestions, call the pollution prevention coordinator at 526-1730 or the DPW utilities program manager at 526-2927.

Cutline: Photo by Brad McColerly. Travis Todd, post operations and maintenance irrigation team, installs a rain sensor on one of Fort Carson's automated irrigation systems.